DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 327 SP 037 638

AUTHOR Taylor, Nancy E.; Wilson, Josephine C.
TITLE Teaching in Culturally Diverse Contexts: Findings from a Reflective Teacher Education Program (A Summary).
PUB DATE 1997-03-00
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Minority Group Children; Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education Programs; *Teacher Student Relationship; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS African Americans

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study of the teacher education practices and student characteristics that contribute to successful teachers of minority children, particularly African-American, whose background differs from their own. The study was conducted over two years on cohorts of students from a reflective teacher education program. First year results indicated that student teachers and first-year teachers experienced difficulties but persisted in teaching in ways consistent with the goals and models of the teacher education program. Both cohorts reported that a major hurdle was coming to grips with their students' home life; they were unprepared for the conditions of their students' lives and behaviors. Difficulties for some students resulted from incongruence of their teaching models and those of their cooperating teachers. Isolation was also a frequent complaint of these first-year teachers who suddenly found themselves in minority status. Student teachers and first-year teachers reported similar experiences in the second year of the study. Findings indicated that teachers and student teachers had problems relating to children's lives outside of school and that only one teacher experienced a school climate that gave her needed information and support. (Contains 16 references.) (ND)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 413 327

TEACHING IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE CONTEXTS: FINDINGS FROM A REFLECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM (A SUMMARY)

Nancy E. Taylor
Josephine C. Wilson

The Catholic University of America

A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association
Chicago, IL. March, 1997

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. Taylor

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Requests for a full copy of this paper may be sent to:

Nancy E. Taylor, Ph. D. & Josephine C. Wilson, Ph. D.
The Catholic University of America
Department of Education, O'Boyle Hall
Washington, DC 20064

SP037638

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TEACHING IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE CONTEXTS: FINDINGS FROM A REFLECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM (A SUMMARY)

OBJECTIVE

The need for minority recruitment into the profession of teaching is a chronic problem in the United States (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Education Commission on the States, 1990). Until this situation and the complex factors that contribute to it are remedied, the majority of teacher candidates are likely to come from the White middle class. Although there is an emerging literature on the characteristics of African-American teachers who are successful with African-American students, especially those from low socio-economic levels in urban schools (Foster, 1993; Henery, 1992) almost nothing is known about the success of non-minority teachers who work in urban schools that serve minority populations (Valli, 1995).

The purpose of the paper is to examine the teacher education practices and student characteristics that contribute to successful teachers of minority children, particularly African-American, whose background differs from their own.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

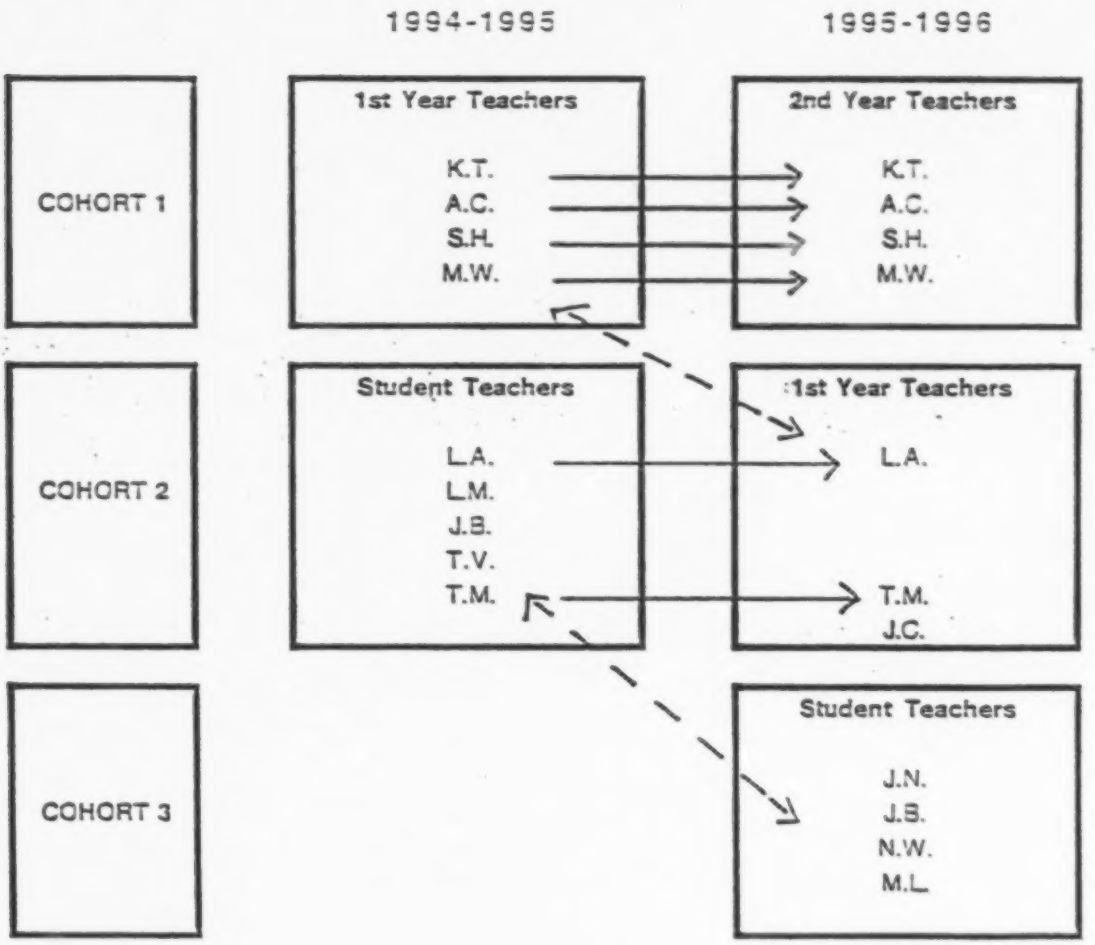
Much recent literature suggests that teachers are strongly influenced by their personal, practical theories of teaching (Clandinin, 1986; Elbaz, 1981; Munby, 1983). Teacher education programs influence these theories, particularly programs that are reflective in nature (Goodman, 1985; Zeichner & Grant, 1981). The study also draws upon the literature on multicultural education, particularly that which relates to teacher and curriculum characteristic (Grant & Koskela, 1985; McDiarmid, 1992; Knapp & Assoc., 1995).

DATA SOURCES

This study was conducted over two years on cohorts of students from a reflective teacher education program. In year 1, subjects from the first cohort graduated and sought employment in the urban school system in which the University is located. They had just completed their first year of teaching in schools that are serving some of the poorest areas of the city. All are White from middle class backgrounds. The second cohort had just completed their senior year and student taught at an inner city school that serves a similar population and is a partnership school to the university. In year 2 we interviewed three people from the student teacher group who took jobs in inner city schools and had just completed their first year, as well as the first cohort all of whom were completing their second year of teaching. We also interviewed a new group of student teachers who taught in the same urban school (Figure I illustrates the groups across the two years).

The primary data for this study came from semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the university spring semester for student teachers and the end of the school year for first and second year teachers. Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Both authors jointly conducted all interviews. Interviews were scheduled to allow unlimited time so that the interview would be terminated naturally where both parties felt an issue had been sufficiently explored. In some cases after the interview was terminated, students and teachers would bring up a new issue in leaving. In these cases, the tape recorder was turned on and the issue was explored as part of the interview. A secondary data source was the action research project that all students had completed as part of the student teaching requirement of this university's teacher education program. These action research papers were consulted as an additional source of information about student teacher's and teacher's reasoning about teaching and learning, the interviews, however, were the main data source.

Figure 1: Professional Position of Informants Across Two Years



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

METHODS

The data were analyzed for patterns using the constant comparative method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Using this technique the theory is grounded in the data although the literature can provide hypotheses about possible patterns. Since a simi-structured interview was used, the questions themselves suggest some of the coding categories. The procedure for generating the codes was the same year One and Year Two. They involved both researchers reading and coding by topic as they arose in the interviews, checking with each other and refining categories as we went along. In the first year study, all work was done by eye and by hand. In the second year of the study we used Qualpro (Version 4) to enter codes and organize the data.

FINDINGS

STUDENT TEACHERS:

Results from the first year indicated that the student teaching cohort experienced difficulty in the initial stages of student teaching, but were persistent in teaching the way that was consistent with the goals of the teacher education program.They used positive methods of control and teaching that was embedded in real world context. These student teachers reported that their biggest hurdle was coming to grips with their student's home life. They felt that it was critically important to understand a child's background and experiences and that this understanding was a critical factor in being able to teach them. They were, however, unprepared for the stark conditions in which many children lived. The difficulty for some student teachers resulted from incongruence of their teaching models and those of their cooperating teachers. These differences occurred in both the modes of discipline and in approaches to instruction. Students had to negotiate the relationships they had with their cooperating teachers and while they had good personal relationships they were not always comfortable talking about issues of teaching. This was not the case for students working with teachers who taught from a more child centered approach. Coursework and the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

involvement of faculty in the school, both as supervisors and in other partnerships with the school were seen as elements that supported them and helped them teach in ways that were consistent with the University's model.

FIRST YEAR TEACHERS:

First year teachers reported that they continued to teach according to the model they learned and practiced while in the teacher education program. The competency based curriculum, still in place in the urban school system, caused them to make some adaptations, but not to sacrifice the meaning oriented, contextualized approach to curriculum even when it was not practiced by the majority of the school. The first year cohort were unprepared for the conditions of students lives and their behavior. Establishing an organized routine took much time than they expected--while recognizing the necessity, they also felt a tension and sense of urgency because their students' academic performance was so low. Their problem with student behavior was framed in terms of consequences to student learning.

While isolation is a frequently mentioned characteristic of teaching, it seems particularly so for these first year teachers who suddenly found themselves in minority status. They talked of having to prove themselves and having little opportunity for dialogue about professional issues. When asked about aspects of the university program that helped them learn to teach, they mentioned the collegial and social support that was available to them in the program.

In the second year of the study the student teacher responses were similar to those of the first year cohort of student teachers. The new first year teachers experienced much of the difficulty expressed by the first cohort of first year teachers with the exception that the second cohort of first year teachers who had done their student teaching in a low income school that had a beginning partnership arrangement with the university seemed to have had less difficulty adjusting to the

condition of students' lives. They seemed to have come to grips with this during their student teaching. Even though two of the three students taught in the same school where they now worked, they still experienced a difficult first year. One advantage they had was the support of the faculty they already knew.

SECOND YEAR TEACHERS:

For the first cohort now in their second year of teaching, the year brought disappointment. While optimistic at the end of the first year they thought they had learned something. They hoped the following year would be an improvement, but by the end of the year, three of the four had either moved from their placements or planned to do so for the following year. Although behavior and conditions of their students' lives played a part in this decision for some; in all cases the major reason for their move was lack of institutional and administrative support.

CONCLUSIONS

Our data suggest that it is by and large these working conditions which we termed Support (Institutional, Administrative, and Collegial) that mediate the adjustment our Teacher Education students made both the conditions of students' lives and their behaviors. Only one teacher experienced a highly supportive school climate that gave her both the information and moral support she needed during her first year.

We were pleased with the degree to which our graduates held fast to their beliefs about what should happen in teaching and learning, although they were sometimes frustrated when student behavior prevented them from achieving what they felt ought to be happening in their classroom. There was great variability in success in mediating this at all three levels (Student Teachers, First Year Teachers, Second Year Teachers) but perserverance was strong.

We were troubled, however, by the degree to which these teachers and student teachers were unable to draw upon student's backgrounds as sources of strength. Ladson-Billings (1992) reminds us that culturally relevant teaching requires the recognition of African American culture as an important strength upon which to construct school experiences. Knapp and Assoc. (1995) designed a continuum of instructional response to students in high poverty environments. There are four dimensions to this scheme: whether the instructional response is contructive or non-constructive and whether the motivation for the response is active or passive (we perfer the terms conscious/unconsious). All of our teachers appear to fall in the constructive/passive-unconscious positon. They use the meaning-centered approaches they learned at the University. However, they had problems relating to children's lives outside of school. They lacked understanding of how to connect with students' lives beyond the classroom and use this connection as a catalist for instruction.

This study contributes to a topic of importance where there is minimal information: the problems encountered by teachers who teach in situations where the culture of the student population is different from their own culture and life experience. Contrary to the literature that suggest that the effects of university course work are quickly eroded as teachers become socialized into their work context, these teachers appeared to hold fast to the educational philosophies they developed in their teacher education program. These philosophies which emphasized a positive approach to classroom management and an approach to instruction that emphasized meaningful, contextualized learning, are to a large degree at odds with the type of instruction and management that goes on in the schools in which they work. The reflective teacher education program which encouraged students to maintain a coherent personal philosophy may have contributed to this. However, even though these teachers experienced a variety of settings in their teacher education education program, including urban settings this did not prepare them for the lack of administrative support they experienced when they taught on their own in these urban schools.

REFERENCES

Carnegie Forum on education and Economy (1986). *A nation prepared: Teachers for the 21th century*. New York: Author.

Clandinin, D.J. (1986). *Classroom practice: Teachers images in action*.. London: Falmer Press.

Education Commission on the States.(1990). *New strategies for producing minority teachers*. Denver: Author.

Elbaz, F. (1981). The teacher's "practical knowledge": Report of a case study. *Curriculum Inquiry*. 11, 43-71.

Foster, M. (1993). Educating for competence in community and culture: Exploring the views of exemplary African-American teachers. *Urban Education*, 27(4), 370-394.

Goodman, J. (1983). The seminar's role in the education of student teachers: A case study. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(3), 44-49.

Goodman, J (1986). *Constructing a practical philosophy of teaching: A study of preservice teacher's professional perspectives*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois.

Grant, C., & Koskela, R. (1985, April). *Education that is multicultural and the relationship between preservice campus learning and field experiences: A report of a study*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Henrey, A. (1992). African-Canadian women teachers' activism: Recreating communities of caring and resistance. *Journal of Negro Education*, 61(3), 392-404.

Irvine, J.J. (1990). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practices, and prescriptions*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Knapp, M.S. & Assocates (1995). *Teaching for meaning in high poverty classrooms*. NY: Teacher College Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. *Theory & Practice*, 31 (4), 312-320.

McDiamid, G.W. (1992). What to do about differences? A study of multicultural education for teacher trainees in the Los Angeles Unified School District. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(2), 83-89.

Munby, H. (1983). *A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs and principles*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.

Valli, L. (1995). The dilemma of race: Learning to be color blind and color conscious. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(2), 120-129.

Zeichner, K.M. & Grant, C. (1981). Biography and social structure in the socialization of student teachers. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 1, 298-314.